

VZCZCXRO9176
PP RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO
DE RUEHAN #0154/01 0631310
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 041310Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2175
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANTANANARIVO 000154

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/E - MBEYZEROV
PARIS FOR RKANEDA
LONDON FOR FLORD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/04/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MA](#)
SUBJECT: DIPLOMATS PRESS ON AS GOM CRACKS DOWN

REF: A. ANTANANARIVO 149
[1](#)B. ANTANANARIVO 152

Classified By: AMBASSADOR NIELS MARQUARDT FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: As UN mediators and opposition leaders coalesce around the idea of inclusive roundtable negotiations to end the current political standoff, President Ravalomanana has implemented increasingly harsh measures to stop protests and reassert his control over Antananarivo. The diplomatic community continues to press both sides for agreement on a series of confidence-building measures, but neither the president nor opposition leaders appear willing to restrain themselves long enough for tempers to cool. The GOM has responded to the daily protests in central Antananarivo with an attempt today to prevent the gathering altogether; by mid-afternoon, security forces were fending off crowds with teargas and warning shots and the conflict had spread to surrounding neighborhoods, although only one injury had been reported at the time of writing. Combined with increased arrests, the hasty acquisition of new riot gear, and Ravalomanana's reticence to actively engage with the political process, it appears that the GOM sees little need for compromise. UN Senior Mediator Tiebille Drame, arriving today, has inherited a very sticky situation. END SUMMARY.

DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS

[1](#)2. (C) UN Envoy Menkerios and key ambassadors have been pushing to improve the negotiating climate by calling on both sides to accept several key confidence-building measures. Of the GOM, they have requested the following:

- Allow the opposition access to public radio (RNM) and television (TVM);
- Release politically held prisoners (notably ex-Minister Theodore Ranjivason) and arrest no others, pending the launch of an independent investigation into the scores of deaths since the crisis began;
- Withdraw the illegally-appointed PDS in Antananarivo (who was installed to replace Rajoelina);
- Guarantee the rights of free speech and assembly;
- Abstain from using arms on civilians.

The US, German, EU and French COMs jointly raised the security-related points above in a call on Minister of Internal Security Desire Rasolofomanana; he listened carefully, but then made clear that restoring order would be the GOM's priority, even if stopping looting might infringe on the right of assembly. He also stressed the fact that no police authorization had been requested, or granted, for the demonstrations on the public place, which makes them illegal.

[1](#)3. (C) The same four COMs delivered a separate demarche to

Rajoelina, focusing on the following points:

- Commit to respecting the rule of law, and to resolving this crisis through dialogue;
- Choose between remaining Mayor of Antananarivo, or becoming "President of the High Transitional Authority" - one person can't hold both positions;
- Stop, and publicly condemn, all provocations and acts of looting and destruction;
- Refrain from provocative propaganda;
- Push for the adoption and implementation by the GOM of measures to alleviate hardship due to the steep rise in staple commodity prices and unemployment.

While Rajoelina seemed receptive in the meeting and agreed (at the time) to avoid provocation, he did just the opposite on the square yesterday. During his speech from Place de 13 Mai, Rajoelina decried Ravalomanana's "killing and betrayal", denounced his leadership of the country, and called on opposition supporters to keep protesting. He called for the foreign management of Jirama (the state utility company) to be removed, and for civil servants to walk out of their ministries and join them on the street (with banners identifying their ministry, ideally). "The fight shall overcome", and "the dictatorship shall end" he declared; it is not clear how that squares with his conversation the previous day.

PROVOCATION AND CRACKDOWN

14. (C) In a document dated February 28, Rajoelina outlined his own specific prerequisites to further negotiation, which match almost exactly those that the COMs delivered to GOM

ANTANANARI 00000154 002 OF 002

interlocutors. Unfortunately for the prospects of dialogue, however, he appears unwilling or unable to control his own supporters, making it unlikely that he will uphold his side of the bargain. Protests continued at the University of Antananarivo with further roadblocks and clashes with security forces, and several provincial capitals have seen violent demonstrations in recent days that could easily reignite. In an attempt to break what had become a daily cycle of protests, speeches, scuffles with security forces, and small-scale opportunistic looting, Ravalomanana has moved to crack down on such activities.

15. (C) On the tactical level, Ravalomanana reportedly personally ordered that today's rally on Place de 13 Mai be prevented altogether; by 0730, police and gendarme (in their new Chinese riot gear - see reftel B) had deployed all over city center, surrounding the area where the rally was scheduled to take place at 1000. The President had not previously been so involved in the day to day operations of the military, and sources indicate that he has recently gone around top commanders who may disagree with his tactics, reaching further down the chain of command instead to get his orders out.

16. (C) The past few days have also seen an increase in arrests of looters, as well as rumors that Rajoelina's dynamic young MC and his political associate Alain Ramaroson were to be arrested over the weekend. Opposition radio stations VIVA and Antsiva have been effectively shut down; VIVA's broadcast frequency has been jammed since around February 27, and Antsiva has stopped broadcasting news after receiving a warning letter from the Ministry of Communications along with intermittent jamming.

17. (C) COMMENT: Ravalomanana's concerns about law and order are real, but his tactics will do little to address the root causes of civil disorder. His Minister for Internal Security is clearly on board, although other ministers (including Communications and Finance) seem to be dodging meeting requests from the COMs. It seems clear that Ravalomanana and the GOM are not in listening mode with respect to the international community's appeal for calming and

confidence-building measures to restore and enhance a favorable climate for a negotiated solution. With increasing unrest in Tana and elsewhere around the country, frequent looting on the margins of demonstrations, and possible fragmentation of the opposition's alliance, he has legitimate reasons to consider law and order alongside political dialogue. The fear, however, is that he's focusing on the former at the expense of the latter. END COMMENT.
MARQUARDT